Summary of Social Science Research on Hazing

Based on amicus brief submitted by HazingPrevention.org on behalf of the State of Florida.

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Presentation created by The Gordie Center at the University of Virginia
Learning Objectives

1. What makes hazing so coercive
   We will learn about different aspects of hazing that can make it hard for people to say no.

2. Why is consent hard to give
   We will talk about consent in regards to hazing and how often times it is nearly impossible to consent in hazing situations.

3. What can you do
   After discussing the previous factors, we will have a discussion on what your organization can do to stop hazing.
Fact or Myth

Many students are introduced to hazing in high school, way before they get to college.

This is.... FACT!
Habituated Hazing During High School

- Students learn to expect hazing in high school, and this causes them to accept and normalize the behavior once they join college organizations.
- Experiences that many students have with hazing in high school leave them with a misperception that hazing is acceptable.
Fact or Myth

Students who participate in hazing understand what they are getting into before participating

This is…

MYTH
Lack of Understanding of Risks

- Victims of hazing often lack a fundamental appreciation for the risks associated with hazing.
- Hazing victims tend to lack information needed to make rational decisions about whether to “consent” to be hazed.
Lack of Understanding of Risks

- With respect to hazing, victims frequently operate in a world of unknowns—walking blindly into hazing without appreciating that they are doing so.

- There is usually asymmetry of information— one person has more or better information than the other person.

- Commonly, the person with a lack of information is the person being hazed.
Fact or Myth

People who are being hazed aren’t pressured by what other people around them are or are not doing

This is...

MYTH
Conforming to Peer Pressure

- Another reason why victim “consent” to hazing rarely exists is because, **group dynamics often elicit conformity**
- Hazing victims conform to the group expectations about hazing either because they seek to
  - Attain social reward
  - Avoid social punishment, loss of group membership, and ostracization
Fact or Myth

People who are being hazed often feel like they are too invested to walk away from their organization, locking themselves in their decision regardless of the risk to their own well-being

This is... FACT
Once the hazing process begins, various psychological forces often continue to propel them through the process even unconsciously.

Within the context of hazing, many victims are likely to stay in a position of risk even when threats to their well-being seem imminent.
Fact or Myth

Often, hazing is a way for members to gain status in their organization.

This is... FACT.
“Membership” as an elusive concept

- Within some organizations, there is a tiered status to membership
- Hazing complicates the notion of membership
  - Non-hazed individuals often take second-class status to those individuals who are hazed
  - To gain first-class status, even individuals who are formal members often give in to hazing
Tiered Membership Status

- Hazing victims who are already organization members may give in to hazing to secure a higher membership status in the organization.
- Once an individual is a member of an organization the risk for hazing is still present.
Discussion

How can you and your organization change the way you approach new member education? Think about the factors we have just discussed.
Conclusion: Why is Hazing Coercive?

- Hazing victims are likely to have been habituated to hazing during high school.
- Most hazing victims lack a fundamental understanding of hazing risks to adequately consent to hazing.
- Hazing victims are likely to succumb and conform to the influence of peers and the pressure those peers exert.
- Once hazing begins, victims likely feel that they have invested too many resources to quit.
Conclusion: Is there really consent to hazing?

• Hazing consent is remarkably difficult to give.
• Because of the examples we have talked about in this presentation, often times students cannot give consent even though it might seem like they can.
• It is important to value your friendships and group ideals over the risk of harming a student.
Questions you can ask moving forward...

- What are your group’s values?
- What do you want to teach your new members?
- Which current positive activities are effective in meeting these goals? What new activities can you plan to promote these goals?